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13 September 1967

The Honorable Robert S. McNamara
The Secretary of Defense
Department of Defense
Washington, D. C.

Dear Bob:

The Executive Committee of the National Reconnaissance Program today discussed the status of the plan to completely phase out OXCART by the end of December of this year and to turn its missions over to SAC using the SR-71. You will recall that this action is being taken in accordance with a Presidential decision of last January.

In essence the situation is this: it is highly doubtful if an OXCART mission capability could be extended beyond 30 November 1967 unless a decision is made by 1 October 1967 to extend the operational life of this program. The principal reasons are set forth below.

As things now stand, there will be no procurement of OXCART spares, hardware and repair of assets if production lead times and delivery dates extend beyond 31 October 1967. Without the ability to acquire additional spares or to repair aircraft and system components, the OXCART program is entirely dependent on "living off-the-shelf" with consequent attrition of support items in stock. In this connection it was agreed that when OXCART is moth-balled a "90-day support package" of stored articles would be included so as to reduce the immediate dependence of a reactivated aircraft on the re-establishment of production lines for essential spares. As of now, it is already becoming necessary to dip into the "90-day support package" and there is at present no funding available for replenishment of those packages.

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A joint SAC/CIA team is now enroute to Kadena Air Base to conduct a survey of OXCART facilities and equipment so as to finalize the plan for SAC deployment of the SR-71 and Agency transfer of assets at Kadena to SAC. A SAC team composed of five specialists will remain at Kadena to begin implementing the transition phase.

Redeployment of the BLACK SHIELD Task Force now at Kadena will commence in November, looking towards a flight schedule for the first aircraft to depart on 14 November, with the second and third aircraft leaving 16 and 18 November respectively. The Base will then be turned over to SAC and if things go as they plan it, they will be ready to start flying the SR-71 on BLACK SHIELD or other similar missions in the Far East on 1 December.

Contractor personnel have been notified that the close-out date is imminent. Therefore each vendor is now in the process of an orderly phase-out of experienced personnel. No personnel actions have been initiated to replace military, Agency or contractor personnel scheduled to depart as their portions of the program terminate.

All of the above was discussed at the NRO Executive Committee on 12 September. The Executive Committee agreed to have the Director, NRO re-examine all the readiness factors for SAC to take over the program as presently planned and to complete that re-examination before the 1 October date so that if re-consideration of the decision to phase out OXCART should be required, the necessary elements of information will be at hand for consideration in time.

The above is intended solely to keep you personally advised on the status of this important program. It has been recorded in the Executive Committee minutes.

Sincerely,

Signed: Dick

Richard Helms
Director

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